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ABSTRACT

This document presents a guide for developing a peer helpers code of behavior. The first section discusses issues relevant to the trainers. These issues include whether to give a model directly to the group or whether to engender "ownership" of the code by the group; timing of introduction of the code; and addressing the issue of consequences for breaching the code. The remainder of the document presents six exercises. The purposes of these exercises are to allow members to reflect on and discuss a variety of helping behaviors; to enable individual group members to create and discuss their own codes of behavior; and to establish and agree to a peer counseling code of behavior. Exercises are included on these topics: (1) finishing the preceding day's activities; (2) defining self images; (3) recalling someone who made members feel special about themselves; (4) creating a friendship coat-of-arms; (5) creating a code of friendship; and (6) a tug-of-war with analysis of members' feelings. (ABL)

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# A Peer Helpers Code of Behavior*

**submitted by David de Rosenroll**

Under "Training" (p. 3 of Programmatic Standards, the NPHA Code of Ethics) , the NPHA suggests that "Development of (a) code of ethics and standards of behavior" is a part of a typical basic peer helper training program. In another section, a *minimum* standard of behavior which should be included in a code for peer helpers is described. The peer trainer is intended to draw two conclusions. (1) All peer helpers must have their own code of behavior (2) and their code must be consistent with the minimum standard as set out in the NPHA Code of Ethics.

On the one hand, NPHA members are given a model code of behavior and, on the other hand, they are told to ensure that their peers have a parallel model. Since NPHA has already created a code of behavior, many trainers may be tempted to use the model instead of working with their groups on a parallel model. They may ask, "Why re-invent the wheel?"

There are several reasons why the NPHA Model should not be given directly to the group, but kept for reference while the peer trainer helps the group create their own Code of Behavior. First, when an important document such as the code is created by a peer group, the peer trainer is seen as trusting that the group can create the document. Also, there is less likelihood of members becoming defensive and resistant to the document than if they perceived the code as being dictated to them. Second, peers will be more likely to take personal responsibility for following the code if the code is a group endeavor rather than an outsider's. Third, if the peers create the code in their own vocabulary, there is more chance that they will all understand what the individual points of the code mean. Fourth, if experiential activities can be included in the session that the code is being formulated, the peers may more dramatically understand the impact of the code and the session will be more consistent with the experiential framework of the other training sessions.

Some trainers may be concerned that, if the peers were left to create their own code of behavior, they may not address or even agree with some major ethical considerations, such as confidentiality issues. We want the peers to experience the code as being their's. Yet, like the rest of us, they must also work within parameters established by the community. There are ways of circumventing this problem. If there are some basic (minimum) rules which the peers absolutely must follow, make certain that they are aware of those rules

when they apply to become peer helpers. When they are working on their code of behavior, remind them of your personal and professional point of view. Set up role plays where they can experience some of the ethical issues they need to address.

Often trainers will leave discussing issues like code of behavior (and referrals) until the end of the peers' basic training when the trainees are probably more ready to deal with creating a code. However, peer volunteers do not mystically become peer helpers on the last minute of the last hour of their training. As early as during the application process, the volunteers are on their way to *being* peer helpers. Every skill or awareness to which they are introduced becomes a part of their potential repertoire of behaviors. Therefore, peers-in-training need to be *introduced* to a basic code of behavior from day 1 of their training onwards. In part this is accomplished by establishing training group norms and by discussing some of the bottom line rules for being a peer. The introduction of concepts connected with ethical issues and of values discussions and exercises throughout the training will support and enhance the completion of the code at the end of the training. The peer trainees will be more prepared to discuss issues surrounding their code of behavior.

The peer group must address the issue of consequences for breaching a code of ethics. The best time for this discussion is while they are creating the code. In this way, the consequences are seen as objective, logical and meaningful. A byproduct is that those peers who developmentally may need a tangible consequence attached to the code to give it additional meaning to them will have that information.

Once a group code of behavior has been constructed and the consequences have been described, the peer group can display this code to their community. The visible code provides information to the peers' potential clients, as well as credibility to the program. The code symbolizes sanctuary in trust, competence in parameters.

* I use the terms **Code of Behavior** or **Code of Friendship** in that Code of Ethics may imply a *professional*code. Although I want peers to be extremely serious about their code, I do not want to taint their voulunteerism with *any* professionalizing term.

## Establishing a Group Code of Behavior

**developed by David A. de Rosenroll**

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**Purpose:**

1. to allow members to reflect on and discuss a variety of helping behaviors;
2. to enable individual group members to create and discuss their own codes of behavior;
3. to establish and agree to a peer counselling code of behavior

This module contains the following exercises:

| | Title | Time |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | **Unfinished Business** | 10 minutes |
| 2. | **Warm-up:** ***Say 'Yes', Say 'No'*** | 25 minutes |
| 3. | ***Someone Special*** | 40 minutes |
| 4. | ***A Friendship Coat-of-Arms*** | 40 minutes |
| 5. | ***A Code of Friendship*** | 30 minutes |
| 6. | ***Tug-of-War*** | 30 minutes |

Note:

This module could be the nucleus to a retreat or workshop where the participants work on all exercises over an uninterrupted period of time (half/whole day, weekend) or the exercises could be used over two or three separate sessions, each session being introduced by Unfinished Business and a Warm-up exercise and completed by some form of Closure. The time frame within which this module is offered will depend on the group's time and energy constraints, the availability of suitable space, and the developmental level of the participants.

The general thrust of the sequence of exercises is to systematically facilitate the participants' reflectiveness concerning friendship behaviors in the context of being peer counsellors.

1. **Unfinished Business**
   Ask the group if there is anything left over from the preceding day's activities or anything that has come up for any of the members since the last session.

2. **Warm Up:** ***Say 'Yes', Say 'No'***

The facilitator asks the participants to choose from forced choice sets of words which the facilitator reads to the students. Choices might include: tortoise/hare, branch/root, jungle/desert, pro/con, hello/goodbye, Bugs Bunny/Elmer Fudd, banana split/one scoop vanilla, hush/clatter, Alaska/Florida, sand/snow, bright light/amber glow. In one column each student lists under 'yes' the words from the forced choice pairs with which they identify and under 'no' they list the words with which they do not identify. One word from each pair must go under either 'yes' or 'no'. After several opportunities to make forced choices, the facilitator encourages the participants to look at their 'yes' list and their 'no' list and reflect on what their choices are saying about them and their self-perceptions. The participants are then asked to find a partner with whom they exchange lists. The partners read the other's answers and, with reference to their partners answers, they attempt to interpret what the words mean to them. The partners then return the lists to one another and the 'authors' of the lists share what meaning the lists have to them.

Group Discussion:

1. Any reactions?
2. When you discussed your choices with your partners, did you share similar views of what your choices represented or did you make your choices for different reasons?
3. How did you go about making your choices?
4. What do these choices say about us?
5. Many of these choices represent ways we have of looking at ourselves or 'self image'. Self image is not something that we are born with like hands or feet or heads. Self images are built from the first day of our lives. What are some of the ways we create and build upon our self images?
6. Did your partner's input alter your interpretations of what your lists mean? How do others help us define our self-images?

3. ***Someone Special***

Ask the students to relax and close their eyes, if that helps them to concentrate. Have them recall a specific person in their lives, either present or past who has been special to them and who has helped them to feel good about themselves. Group leaders may want to model this exercise for the students by sharing something from their experiences. This modelling could be done at this point or during debriefing.

Instructions:

1. Recall the person. Remember their face; the way they talked; how they felt to your touch. Recall specific odors to them or their clothing. What does their clothing look like?
2. Recall a specific occasion where this person, through their words or actions, helped you to build your self-image. If a specific occasion doesn't come to mind, remember what it was about them that caused you to feel good about you. Try to remember examples.
3. Imagine this person in front of you right now. They are sitting close to you and you have an opportunity to tell them what you are recalling and you have a chance to thank them. What would you say to them?
4. In a moment, I'm going to ask you to come back to the group. Before we do that, I'd like you to reflect on what parts of this exercise, if any, you would like to share with the rest of the group: the person, the experience, your feelings and thoughts, how they affected your self image, your statement of thanks.

Group discussion:

When debriefing, the leader should attempt to prompt for information concerning the special person's behaviors and their effects. As the group may respond spontaneously or cautiously, the leader may either have to lift information from each person's story or ask questions of the group concerning the special person. One way of facilitating sharing is to move around the group and ask each person what they would like to share from the exercise.

4. ***A Friendship Coat-of-Arms***

Give each person a sheet of paper and ask them to create a shield which contains five separate areas. The outline of the shield should resemble a medieval shield. Within the outline, two horizontal lines should cut across the shield dividing the shield into three equal areas. Then, a vertical line should be drawn down the shield cutting the top two-thirds of the shield in half.

Once the group members have constructed their shields, have them fill in the five areas in the following manner (note: give them only one area to fill in at a time. This is a building exercise):

1. Top Left area: The word or phrase that describes the behavior of the special person you imagined in the last exercise;
2. Top Right area: How I help others to feel good about themselves;
3. Middle Left area: The quality or characteristic I need to perceive in another person before I am ready to share something really personal;
4. Middle Right area: The quality or characteristic I possess that might allow someone else to feel comfortable about sharing something personal with me;
5. Bottom of Shield: What image or metaphor might best describe the peer helper you would like to be? (The leader might want to choose more concrete words like 'animal' or 'something out of nature' to help to stimulate their imaginations).

This exercise is to be done by each individual. Once they have completed their shields, they can either form teams of two and then four to combine their shields or they can each share their shield with the whole group and have each person's individual shield built into a huge group shield chart to be posted on wall in a public area. If they are partnering to share, conclude the exercise by bringing the whole group together and asking them to react to the exercise and to share one element of their shield with the group. If the whole group is combining their shields, be certain to include all members and to encourage the group members to question one another and show interest in each others' shields.

5. ***A Code of Friendship***

Here is an opportunity for the group to build and to discuss a peer counselling code of conduct. The previous exercises, particularly the Coat of Arms exercise, should lend themselves to the group constructing its code.

Notes:

1. The group leader should attempt to keep the words used in the code as informal as possible (i.e., rather than 'confidentiality', the words used might be 'keeping a secret).
2. It is important for group leaders to be clear as to their own professional ethics so that they can discuss them with their students.
3. Try to stay away from abstract language. Help the students to clarify what they mean.
4. Issues like: 1. *when keeping a secret is and isn't appropriate* and 2. *when and how to refer clients* will need considerable work and clarification.

Process:

1. "As a group of peer helper, our common purpose is to help others as best as we can and to avoid occasions where we might hurt or be unhelpful to those we are trying to help."
2. "A Code of Friendship is one term which we might want to use to describe our code of conduct. Can anyone explain why 'Code of Friendship' might apply to us?
3. "What are some aspects of conduct and friendship which we've discussed today that might fit into our Code of Friendship?"
4. "What other things might we want to include into our code?"
5. "Are there areas in our code that are more important than others?"
6. "Are there areas in our code where, if the peer helper doesn't follow the code, they should face specific consequences? (If so, what should the consequences be?)
7. "Where should we place this code?" (Many programs have placed their Code of Friendship in a public area, on pamphlets, in the peer counselling alcove, in student newspapers, and sent copies around to teachers and administrators.)
8. "Who will make sure that the code is posted (or copied, etc.)?

6. ***Tug-of-War***

1. Have each student find a partner and an area where they can move around.
2. Place a piece of masking tape across the floor to divide the area between each partnership. Have the students move four feet away from the tape.
3. Ask them to imagine that they are competing against one another in the World Title Tug-of-War Contest. You will time them for one or two minutes and they have to try to pull their opponent across the line while not being pulled themselves. Give each partnership a piece of *rope* (a heavy piece of stretchy waitband material reduces the 'competitive' urges). Begin.
4. After three minutes, ask them to discuss the experience with their partner. Ask them to discuss thoughts and feelings they had during the process.
5. Ask them to gather together as a group.

Group Discussion:

1. What were your thoughts and feelings about the exercise? Was it hard? Easy? What made it hard or easy?
2. Has anyone ever been in a real tug-of-war? Tell us about it.
3. A tug-of-war can provide us with an image of people struggling with one another. Can anyone suggest examples?
4. We each have our own personal struggles or tug-of-wars. Sometimes the tug-of-war is between two people and sometimes it's within one person - like making a choice or making a decision about something. Can any of the group members describe ones they have experienced?
5. As peer helpers who are trying to live by a Code of Friendship, we all may face a tug-of-war from time-to-time. As you look down our code, try to pick out one area from the code that might cause a tug-of-war inside of you.
6. To each peer helper: - what is the area of the code? what would be your tug-of-war? what can we do to help you? what can you do to help yourself?
7. Look for themes in the discussions, as well as apparent areas for further discussion or work. Continue to use the image of the tug-of-war to facilitate discussion and suggestions. For example, if I'm having a hard time on my end of the rope, adding one or more supporters either to help me pull or to cheer me on might help. Letting go of the rope until I'm in better condition might help. Increasing my leverage (with more training or consultation) might help.

7. **Closure.**

What one thing have you learned about you, as a peer helper, as a result of today's session?

**- Completion -**